

CHAPTER 2 – Planning Framework

INTRODUCTION

The Forest Plan is part of a 50-year framework for long-range resource planning established by the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA). The Forest Service has conducted several internal reviews throughout the planning process to help set the context for Forest Plan revision. This review of national, regional, and local findings provides the context in which forest planning occurs.

DIRECTION, POLICY, AND STRATEGIES: NATIONAL

Resource Planning Act

The Resource Planning Act provides programmatic context and a general strategic course the Forest Service strives to follow. The 2000 RPA Assessment presents a long-term strategy (1995 to 2045), describes all Forest Service activities under its jurisdiction, and identifies broad resource and program needs that respond to anticipated demands. It provides general guidance for forest, state assistance, and research planning. Among priority management actions, the following illustrate the strategic direction of Forest Service programs and activities over the next 50-year planning horizon:

- Conservation of biological diversity.
- Maintenance of productive capacity of forest and range ecosystems.
- Maintenance of forest ecosystem health and vitality.
- Maintenance and enhancement of long-term socio-economic benefits to meet the needs of societies.

Strategic Plan of the USDA Forest Service

Through conservation, we can improve the current and future quality of life for the American people, by protecting and enhancing clean air, abundant water, and healthy habitat on our Nation's forests and grasslands. Four threats to conservation—growing fire danger due to hazardous fuel buildups; the spread of invasive species; loss of open space; and unmanaged recreation, particularly the unmanaged use of off-highway vehicles—increasingly keep us from delivering clean air, abundant water, and healthy habitat (USDA Forest Service, 2004).

The Strategic Plan addresses these threats by providing six goals, with performance measures to evaluate success. The six goals do not capture every part of the Forest Service mission, but they do provide a way to focus on the most important issues the agency is facing today. The six goals of the Strategic Plan for 2004-2008 are:

- ***Reduce the risk from catastrophic wildland fire:*** Restore the health of the Nation's forests and grasslands to increase resilience to the effects of wildland fire.
- ***Reduce the impacts from invasive species:*** Restore the health of the Nation's forests and grasslands to be resilient to the effects of invasive insects, pathogens, plants, and pests.

Preliminary Analysis of the Management Situation

- ***Provide outdoor recreation opportunities:*** Provide high-quality outdoor recreational opportunities on forests and grasslands, while sustaining natural resources, to meet the Nation's recreation demands.
- ***Help meet energy resource needs:*** Contribute to meeting the Nation's need for energy.
- ***Improve watershed condition:*** Increase the number of forest and grassland watersheds that are in fully functional hydrologic condition.
- ***Mission-related work in addition to that which supports the agency goals:*** Conduct research and other mission-related work to fulfill statutory stewardship and assistance requirements.

Healthy Forests Restoration Act

The Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) was signed in December 2003. HFRA is aimed at expediting the preparation and implementation of hazardous fuels reduction projects on federal land and assisting rural communities, states, and landowners in restoring healthy forest conditions on state and private lands. It also authorizes large-scale silvicultural research, the acquisition of conservation easements, and the establishment of monitoring and early warning systems for insect and disease outbreaks.

Ecosystem Management

Ecosystems are places where all plants, animals, minerals, soils, waters, climates, people, and processes of life interact as a whole. They may be small, such as a rotting log, or large, such as a mountain range, with smaller ecosystems nested within larger ecosystems. Ecosystems are organic, living systems that evolve over time. The structure and functions of a healthy ecosystem allow maintenance of a desired condition of biological diversity, biotic integrity, and ecological processes.

Ecosystem management combines specific ecological knowledge on various scales to produce desired resource values, products, services, and conditions while sustaining the diversity and productivity of the ecosystems involved. The goal of ecosystem management is to restore and/or sustain the health, productivity, and biological diversity of ecosystems while providing for social values and economic goals within the capability of the resource. Ecosystem management focuses on overall ecosystem health and productivity, rather than on achieving a set of resource outputs. This is achieved through an understanding of how different parts of the ecosystem function with each other.

An ecosystem approach to management integrates ecological, economic, and social factors to maintain and enhance the quality of the environment. Through implementation of land and resource management plans, the agency ensures sustainable ecosystems by restoring and maintaining species diversity and ecological productivity that helps provide recreation, water, timber, range, minerals, fish, wildlife, wilderness, and aesthetic values for current and future generations.

While there are some important differences between ecosystem management and how National Forest System lands have been managed in the past, the Forest Service is still managing under the Multiple-Use, Sustained-Yield Act. However, a much greater emphasis is being placed on sustaining ecological processes as well as providing for a wide variety of goods, services, conditions, and values.

DIRECTION, POLICY, AND STRATEGIES: REGIONAL

The Manti-La Sal National Forest is an integral part of larger ecosystems. Regional assessments and subsequent forest plan amendments, like those described below, considered different geographic scales and in doing so, helped to identify or maintain future land management options. As part of the context for the Manti-La Sal National Forest planning efforts, management direction from these amendments will be reviewed and applicable direction retained.

Utah Northern Goshawk Amendment

This statewide direction addressed the management of northern goshawk habitat until such management could be incorporated into the forest plan revisions of the State's six national forests (Ashley, Dixie, Fishlake, Manti-La Sal, Uinta, and Wasatch-Cache).

Utah Fire Amendment

The Utah Fire Amendment provides management direction that allows fire to play a more natural role in the ecosystem. The amendment addresses suppression of unwanted wildfire in areas with important social and economic values, reduction of hazardous fuels, and identifies where prescribed fire and wildland fire use are authorized. The amendment provides fire management direction consistent with national policy and additional tools to help land managers achieve the desired conditions described in existing forest plans.

Regional and Sub-Regional Assessment of Properly Functioning Condition

Ecosystems at any temporal or spatial scale are in a properly functioning condition when they are dynamic and resilient to disturbances to structure, composition, and processes of their biological or physical components.

The intent of the properly functioning condition assessment is to increase understanding of ecosystem components at a variety of scales, and to identify those that are at risk. Risk refers to situations in which the outcome is not certain but the chance of system degradation beyond the point of resiliency and sustainability can be estimated.

Both an Intermountain Regional Properly Functioning Condition Assessment (1996), which encompassed all USFS Region 4 national forests, and a Utah High Plateaus and Mountain Section Sub-Regional Properly Functioning Condition Assessment (1996), which encompassed the majority of the Dixie, Fishlake, and Manti-La Sal National Forests, have been completed.

DIRECTION, POLICY, AND STRATEGIES: LOCAL

Manti-La Sal National Forest Assessment of Properly Functioning Condition

A draft properly functioning condition assessment for the Manti-La Sal National Forest was completed in July 1998 (Appendix B). At the Forest level, this assessment identifies ecosystem composition, structure, patterns, and functions, and the minimum level of integrity and functioning needed to maintain a healthy ecosystem. This information will be used while conducting landscape or watershed level analysis to aid in the identification of resource management concerns and issues. See Chapter 3, Vegetation, for more information on the Properly Functioning Condition Assessment.

Oil and Gas Leasing Amendment

The Record of Decision (ROD) for the Final Environmental Impact Statement for Oil and Gas Leasing on Lands Administered by the Manti-La Sal National Forest was signed in January 1994. The ROD amended the Forest Plan and made two decisions required by federal regulations (36 CFR 228, Subpart E). The first decision identified which lands are administratively available for leasing. The second decision authorized the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to offer specific lands for lease and identified the conditions of surface occupancy (stipulations).